

Persian Gulf War

On Aug. 2, 1990, Iraqi military forces, on orders from President Saddam HUSSEIN, invaded and occupied the small Arab state of Kuwait. The Persian Gulf War of 1991—from January 16 to February 28—was fought to expel Iraq and restore Kuwaiti independence.

The war introduced several technologically advanced weapon systems. As well, the United States forged a broad-based international coalition that confronted Iraq militarily and diplomatically. New to this crisis was the remarkable cooperation between Washington and Moscow. This enabled the United Nations Security Council to pass a series of 12 resolutions condemning the invasion, culminating in a decision to use force if Iraq did not withdraw unconditionally by Jan. 15, 1991.

The military coalition consisted of: Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kuwait, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Korea, Spain, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and the United States. In its largest overseas commitment since the Vietnam War, the United States deployed more than 500,000 troops, 1,800 aircraft, and about 100 ships.

The United States took the unusual step of asking countries to contribute financially to the costs of the war. More than \$53 billion were pledged and received. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were the largest donors.

Although no Arab government sent personnel to fight alongside the Iraqis, Hussein won some support in the Arab world by pledging to follow up the invasion with the liberation of Palestine and by calling for a more equal redistribution of Arab oil wealth among the Arab states. After the August invasion and a short-lived puppet government, Kuwait was annexed and proclaimed the 19th "Iraqi province."

In a bid to justify the invasion Hussein noted correctly that until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Kuwait had been part of the Ottoman province of Basra, a city in the south of modern Iraq. However, Iraq in its present borders was not created until after World War I. A further flaw in the legal case was that Baghdad had recognized Kuwaiti independence in 1963 after repeatedly claiming sovereignty over Kuwait once the British mandate over Iraq ended in the 1930s. Hussein also charged that Kuwait had been illegally pumping oil from the Iraqi oil field of Rumaila, which straddles the Kuwait-Iraq border, and otherwise conspiring to reduce Iraq's oil income.

PREWAR DEVELOPMENTS

The invasion of Kuwait caught the world by surprise and ended a U.S. policy of accommodating Saddam Hussein. Iraq had cut its diplomatic ties to the United States during the 1967 ARAB- ISRAELI WAR, signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1972, and resumed formal relations with the United States only in 1984. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), the United States sought to counterbalance the influence of Iran—and prevent Tehran from winning—by enhancing relations with Baghdad. To broaden U.S.-Iraq relations and in a failed attempt to influence postwar Iraqi behavior, the Reagan and Bush administrations increased purchases of Iraqi oil, authorized a major program of agricultural credits, expanded bilateral trade, and passed along some intelligence on Iran during the late 1980s. The U.S. policy, termed "Operation Staunch," was not to sell U.S. arms to either Iran or Iraq and to prevent all arms transfers to Iran. The Reagan administration violated this policy by attempting to trade Iran arms for American hostages held in Lebanon. The resulting scandal became popularly known as the "Iran Gate" or IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR.

During the spring of 1990 the United States began to reevaluate its policy toward Iraq. Iraq was threatening to respond with chemical weapons to an attack on it by Israel, publicly decrying the U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf, and making increasingly belligerent threats against Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Iraq accused both of those states of breaking agreements limiting oil production and thereby severely depressing world oil prices and costing Iraq billions of dollars in annual revenue.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait united almost the entire world community in opposition. President George BUSH had little difficulty in initially winning domestic support to confront Iraq forcibly; however, the administration found it difficult to articulate a single overriding reason for going to war against Iraq. Was it to oppose aggression or was it just to preserve the security of global oil supplies? Why were other powers, more directly concerned as consumers of Persian Gulf oil, reluctant to commit forces and risk their youth in battle and even to pay for the costs of the war? Critics of President Bush continued to maintain that he was playing down the issue of energy supplies to sell the

war to U.S. public opinion.

After consulting with U.S. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney in early August, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia invited American troops onto Saudi soil to protect the kingdom against any further advance by the Iraqi army. This deployment was termed "Operation Desert Shield." These original, rapid-deployment troops, outfitted with light, mostly "defensive" weaponry, were later reinforced by additional infantry and heavy weaponry. On Nov. 8, 1990, President Bush announced a force buildup to provide an offensive option, termed "Operation Desert Storm," to force Iraq out of Kuwait. The ensuing massive buildup took another two-and-one-half months and involved air-and sea-lift.

After an extraordinarily searching debate in January 1991, the U.S. Congress voted to support military operations against Iraq as called for in the Security Council resolution of late November authorizing use of "all necessary means" if Baghdad did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15. The congressional vote, although close, was considered to have marked the end of the "Vietnam syndrome," the phrase describing the American state of mind opposing commitment of U.S. forces abroad unless clearly essential to American national interests. Following the occupation of Kuwait, the government of Iraq had refused to allow more than 4,000 Western and Asian citizens in Iraq to leave. Saddam Hussein intended to use these "hostages" as bargaining chips or a shield against attack by the coalition. They were all released by mid-December.

The Iraqi president meanwhile had launched a series of diplomatic initiatives for a negotiated withdrawal, the first in August, but Washington continued to insist on unconditional withdrawal. Shrugging off personal interventions by the presidents of France and the Soviet Union and the secretary-general of the United Nations, as well as a final warning in January that the United States would not let the status quo stand, Hussein resolutely maintained the occupation of Kuwait. Defying most predictions, he did not choose to seek a way out of the confrontation by making at least a partial withdrawal of his forces. Even as late as January such a move probably would have staved off the war. Hussein reportedly believed that from the beginning, in early August, the United States was firmly committed to go to war. He may have determined that his best chance for survival was to inflict unacceptable losses on the coalition in a war of attrition.

AIR WAR

The military campaign against Iraq was two-phased. To minimize casualties, the coalition forces—with U.S. general Norman SCHWARZKOPF commanding the non-Arab and Saudi general Khalid Sultan commanding the Arab units—pursued a strategy beginning with five weeks of intensive air attacks and ending with a ground assault. Drawing on its 1,800 planes, land- and carrier- based, the United States flew the greatest number of sorties, with the British, French, and Saudis making up most of the rest. The coalition deployed technologically advanced weapon systems, such as the unmanned Tomahawk CRUISE MISSILE, the antimissile version of the Patriot ANTIAIRCRAFT SYSTEM, and advanced infrared targeting that illuminated Iraqi tanks buried in the sand. Its use of aircraft never before engaged in combat, such as the British Tornado and U.S. F-117A STEALTH FIGHTER, gave it an accuracy and firepower that overwhelmed the Iraqi forces.

The world viewed selective videotapes of bombings by the coalition during the daily military televised debriefings. (News from the front was restricted through the Pentagon's policy of allowing only pool coverage of the actual fighting.) Postwar analysts disputed the claims of uniformly superior accuracy of coalition bombing through use of "smart" bombs. The smart bombs accounted for only 7 percent of all bombs dropped. Some scored remarkably accurate hits. Others missed their targets when their laser guidance systems failed.

In an attempt to keep Iran neutral, a few weeks after the August invasion Iraq had declared that it was restoring the pre-Iran-Iraq War status-quo in regard to the Iran-Iraq boundary in the Shatt al-Arab riverway at the north end of the Persian Gulf. Iran did not intervene militarily in the Gulf War, and to that extent Hussein's strategy was successful. However, in an attempt to preserve some of its military capability, Iraq evacuated 137 of its aircraft to Iran during the air war. To emphasize its continuing hostility, Iran kept possession of the Iraqi aircraft after the war.

GROUND WAR

The ground war began at 8:00 PM on February 23 and lasted exactly 100 hours. This phase featured a massively successful outflanking movement of the Iraqi forces. Schwarzkopf engaged in a deceptive maneuver by deploying a large number of forces as if to launch a large amphibious landing. The Iraqis apparently anticipated that they also would be attacked frontally and had heavily fortified those defensive positions. Schwarzkopf instead moved the bulk of his forces west and north in a major use of helicopters, attacking the Iraqis from their rear. The five weeks of

intensive air attack had greatly demoralized the Iraqi front-line troops, causing wholesale desertions. Remaining front-line forces were quickly killed or taken prisoner with minimal coalition losses. Iraqi front-line commanders had already lost much of their ability to communicate with Baghdad.

In an effort to draw Israel into the war and destroy the coalition, the Iraqis launched their improved version of the Soviet Scud missile against Israeli targets. In response to American urging, Israel stayed out of the fighting and accepted U.S.-manned Patriot antimissile batteries. The Patriot intercepted or partially destroyed many of the approximately 85 missiles that Iraq fired against Saudi Arabia and Israel.

President Bush's decision to terminate the ground war at midnight February 28 was criticized for allowing Baghdad to rescue a large amount of military equipment and personnel that were later used to suppress the postwar rebellions of its Shiite and Kurdish citizens. In his own defense, the president asserted that the war had accomplished its mandate, given by the Security Council, to expel the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and reestablish Kuwaiti independence. His decision was probably influenced by his desire to maintain coalition unity, particularly to keep on board the Arab members, who were increasingly unhappy at the devastation inflicted on Iraq's infrastructure and civilian population.

Iraq, for its part, had gravely misjudged the coalition's war strategy, its degree of unity, its firepower, and the number of casualties that the Iraqi army could inflict. The United States suffered only 148 killed in action, 407 wounded, and 121 killed in nonhostile actions. Women also served in greater numbers and in a variety of military roles than ever before. Fifteen of the casualties were women. The Persian Gulf War successfully tested for the first time whether the American All-Volunteer Force could be effective in war. Of the U.S. forces approximately 228,000 were drawn from National Guard and Air National Guard units from across the United States.

In June 1991 the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimated that 100,000 Iraqi soldiers died, 300,000 were wounded, 150,000 deserted, and 60,000 were taken prisoner. The DIA said the estimate could be off by as much as 50 percent. Many human rights groups claimed markedly different numbers.

AFTERMATH

The reconstruction of Kuwait was a main concern of the allies after the war. The Kuwaiti countryside was littered with thousands of land mines and unexploded ordnance. In addition giant pools of spilled oil and 730 burning oil wells set afire by the Iraqis enveloped all animal life in toxic fluids or gases. The U.S. Corps of Engineers and foreign construction firms actively assisted in the reconstruction.

Iraqi Upheavals and UN Sanctions

On Feb. 28, 1991, Iraq's SHIITES in the southern town of al- Zubayr rose against the Iraqi forces there. The insurgency quickly spread throughout the south of Iraq. This was followed on March 5 by a rebellion of Iraqi KURDS in the north. The Shiites were ruthlessly suppressed by Iraqi regulars, who then turned northward. The campaign against the Kurds caused a flood of refugees, estimated at 2 million, who fled to Iraqi mountaintops and into neighboring Turkish and Iranian territory. To stop the refugee flow, the United Nations created a security zone above the 36th parallel in northern Iraq, and coalition forces began providing humanitarian assistance under an operation designated "Provide Comfort" and later "Safe Haven." Iraqi military units were forbidden to cross the 36th parallel by land or air and, under the terms of the cease-fire, were forbidden to fly fixed-wing military aircraft anywhere in the country. In turn, Baghdad imposed a total administrative and economic blockade of the northern region.

The Shiite Muslim and Kurdish rebellions showed how widespread the opposition to Hussein's regime had become. That these rebellions failed was due partly to the force he was still able to deploy and also to the fear of Iraq's Sunni Arabs that they might face a Shiite effort to take over the traditionally Sunni-led country if Saddam Hussein were to be overthrown. Overt Iranian assistance to the Shiites after they had started their rebellion in the south allowed Hussein to play on this fear.

The Iraqi political opposition, many of whose leaders had been in exile for more than 20 years, had only limited success after the war in agreeing on a common political platform. They continued to look to foreign patrons to help unify them. The Kurdish community living north of the 36th parallel held peaceable and free elections in June 1991, a step that may assist the process of Iraqi democratization. However, it predictably unnerved both the Turkish and Iranian governments.

Both countries have sizable Kurdish minorities whose desire for greater autonomy or even independence from the ruling majorities is well known.

The coalition partners agreed after the war that the UN sanctions, featuring a sweeping economic embargo of Iraq, would continue until its inventories of nonconventional weapons had been destroyed. Left unstated was the coalition's expectation that these sanctions would help unseat the Iraqi leadership. With his customary ruthlessness, Hussein refused to accept a UN offer of a limited sale of Iraqi oil to buy food and medicines for his population, because their distribution would have involved a highly visible and pervasive UN presence. This he found too politically embarrassing to accept. Instead he blamed the United States for trying to starve the Iraqi people and causing the deaths of many Iraqi children. This propaganda had some effect in the Arab world, where public opinion was already troubled by the suffering of Iraqi civilians during the war. It also posed a policy dilemma for the United States and the United Nations, which had assumed that Hussein either would not survive the war or at least would be overthrown by his own military shortly thereafter.

Postwar Diplomatic Initiative

The war also created a new opportunity for peacemaking in the Middle East. Shortly after the Iraqi invasion President Bush announced that once the Iraqi forces vacated Kuwait, he would resume efforts to advance the Arab-Israeli peace process. After the war Secretary of State James Baker undertook several trips to the Middle East in an effort that culminated in the convening of an international conference on Arab-Israeli peace jointly sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union in Madrid in October 1991. The increased Arab readiness to participate in such talks—representatives of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria as well as a Palestinian delegation participated—unquestionably reflected changes in the regional attitude caused by the war.

The aftereffects of the war also enabled the United States to forge closer cooperation with certain regional allies that participated in the coalition. The U.S. signed new defense agreements with several coalition members providing for joint exercises, training, and prepositioning of military equipment. In sum, the war against Iraq set several international precedents while its consequences, including the future of the Saddam Hussein government and the Kurdish region in the north, remained in doubt.

Richard W. Murphy

Bibliography: Algosaibi, Ghazi A., *The Gulf Crisis: An Attempt to Understand* (1993); Allen, T. B., et al., *War in the Gulf* (1991); Graubard, S. R., *Mr. Bush's War* (1992); Henderson, Simon, *Instant Empire* (1991); Miller, Judith, and Myroie, Laurie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf* (1990); Ridgeway, James, ed., *The March to War* (1991); Sciolino, Elaine, *Outlaw State* (1991); Summers, H. G., Jr., *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War* (1992).